



**TRI-COUNTY  
HEAD START**  
Berrien • Cass • Van Buren  
*Ready Children 0-5 • Ready Families • Ready Communities*

# Self-Assessment

## 2023-2024

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# Introduction

As a Head Start program, Tri-County Head Start conducts an annual self assessment of our overall program effectiveness, our progress in meeting program goals and objectives, and our compliance in implementing Federal Regulations. The self assessment must measure our agency's strengths and areas for growth, allowing for continuous, data-informed improvement of the program to enhance the services we offer to the children and families in our community.

## Tri-County Head Start

Tri-County Head Start (TCHS) began in 1972, and currently serves 583 children in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren County with Head Start (3-4 year olds), and Early Head Start (0-3 year olds) programs. TCHS operates both center based and home based programming in 20 centers and 41 classrooms. The organization is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization operated by Tri-County Council for Child Development, Inc.

## Assessment Context

Tri-County Head Start began the first year of our 5-year grant cycle on February 1st, 2020. The Self-Assessment is conducted on the same timeline as the fiscal year and the grant year. The Self-Assessment process was designed with the assistance of Training and Technical Assistance professionals, input from staff, and the input and approval from the governance team. This report includes ongoing implementation and has been approved by the governance team. Inclusion of staff, families, and community is prioritized during the Self Assessment process.



# Methodology



## Pre-assessment

The TCHS directors team reviews agency data, including data related to the organization's program and school readiness goals, on a regular basis. Insights are presented to the Board and Policy Council on a monthly basis and shared with staff.



## Team engagement

Staff, Board, and Policy Council members were invited to take part in the self assessment team meetings. The team for this report included the CEO/Executive director, the directors team, and staff from each department.

TCHS partnered with enFocus, a non-profit consulting firm headquartered in South Bend, IN, to compile, analyze, and present program data, to facilitate the assessment team meetings, and to assist with report preparation.



## Staff survey

The staff survey was distributed to all staff in late February and early March 2024 and had 144 respondents. The survey contained 46 questions designed to gauge satisfaction of staff from different roles and tenures within the organization (Appendix page A98).



## Family survey

The family survey was distributed to TCHS families in late February and early March 2024 and had 111 respondents. The survey contained 43 questions designed to gauge the needs of TCHS families and the satisfaction of TCHS families with the organization's current offerings and operations (Appendix page A46).



## Self-assessment team meetings

During the first self assessment team meeting, team members analyzed and discussed data from all TCHS departments. Team members then identified strengths and opportunities that were revealed by the data and their own experiences of TCHS (Appendix page A3).

During the second team meeting, team members considered how the strengths and opportunities identified in the previous meeting could shape the direction of new 5 year goals and objectives. They also took into account areas of need in the community that were identified by TCHS's Community Needs Assessment team. Team members also identified tactics that could be employed to make an impact in areas of opportunity (Appendix pages A3-6).

# 2020-2025 GOAL AREA

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND STAFF ADVANCEMENT

**GOAL: TRI-COUNTY HEAD START WILL ENHANCE STRENGTHS-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STAFF MEMBERS TO MAXIMIZE THEIR POTENTIAL AND QUALITY OF SERVICE.**

## OBJECTIVE

## PROGRESS

1. TCHS will monitor staff shortages to ensure reliability and quality of services, operating all classrooms without closures due to staffing by January 31, 2025. →

While staff shortages continue to be a challenge, a shift from the use of substitutes to a system of floating associate teachers has contributed to a decrease in classroom closures due to staffing shortages since the 2022-2023 program year (Appendix page A18).

2. TCHS will support staff in their academic achievement by providing access to educational opportunities for an average of 30 staff members to advance their degrees and credentials annually by January 31, 2025. →

TCHS consistently surpasses this goal through a Child Development Associate (CDA) certification program through Michigan's Childcare Resources (CCR) organization and through partnerships with Southwest Michigan College and Indiana Tech. Michigan's TEACH scholarship also provides funding to pay for staff to earn college degrees. Recently updated requirements for new hires ensure that teachers commit to obtaining a BA with the assistance of TCHS, which will result in an increased percentage of teachers with a BA degree.

3. TCHS will implement a continuously improving onboarding experience by implementing a 90-day feedback loop with new hires that will increase retention, inspire an engaged workforce, and build a team of mentors who will be targeted for future leadership opportunities. Onboarding practices and feedback information will be reviewed and revised quarterly, throughout the grant cycle. →

The TCHS human resources team has implemented the feedback system and is continuously adjusting the onboarding process in response to feedback (Appendix page A87).

4. TCHS will offer staff a deeper dive, or next level, of training for experienced staff to ensure they are continuously improving and expanding their knowledge bases, at each Head Start Expo and at other opportunities beginning May 2020 and extending through the grant period. →

TCHS's Head Start Expo resumed in person in 2023 and 2024, offering all staff an immersive conference experience. Additionally, other staff have traveled to conferences, as permitted by funding levels.

## KEY INSIGHTS

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND STAFF ADVANCEMENT

**GOAL: TRI-COUNTY HEAD START WILL ENHANCE STRENGTHS-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STAFF MEMBERS TO MAXIMIZE THEIR POTENTIAL AND QUALITY OF SERVICE.**

### STRENGTHS

Site closures due to staffing issues have decreased during the past program year (see above, in the update for Objective 1; Appendix page A18).

41% of staff are current or former HS parents, increasing over the past several years and higher than the national average of 24.1% (Appendix page A103).

75% of staff are satisfied or very satisfied with professional development opportunities offered by TCHS (Appendix page A112); some staff expressed desires for more training opportunities related to working with students with disabilities, the HighScope curriculum, and Conscious Discipline.

The human resources team has streamlined the hiring process, lowering the vacancy rate from 15.2% in February 2023 to 6.8% in December 2023 and reducing average time to hire to 12 days from application to hire, as of December 2023 (Appendix page A87).

During the most recent program year (2023-2024) fewer staff have considered leaving TCHS for a job with a different ECE agency (14% vs. 25% during the 2022-2023 program year) or for a different career path (18% vs. 30% during the 2022-2023 program year) (Appendix page A116).

Responses on the staff survey reflect a positive organizational culture overall, general satisfaction with compensation and benefits, and an overall positive perception of TCHS leadership (Appendix pages A96-97).

45% of staff have improved their educational attainment since joining TCHS and many staff are currently furthering their education, especially through the CDA certificate (Appendix page A108-109).

### OPPORTUNITIES

Continue developing strategies to give positive feedback to staff and to further cultivate staff collegiality

Improve training and buy in for Conscious Discipline

Continue to increase the percentage of teachers with BA degrees to target 50% by facilitating educational opportunities and having new hire teachers commit to earning BA degrees.

Consider how TCHS could respond to employee childcare needs; 8.3% of staff survey respondents struggle to find affordable or reliable childcare and 11.8% anticipate having childcare needs in the future (Appendix page A133).

# 2020-2025 GOAL AREA

# COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

**GOAL: TRI-COUNTY HEAD START WILL INCREASE COMMUNITY AWARENESS THAT WE ARE LEADERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.**

## OBJECTIVE

## PROGRESS

1. TCHS will achieve NAEYC accreditation for all sites by January 31, 2025 to ensure our organization meets the hallmark of a quality institution in early education. →

NAEYC accreditation is being pursued at 2 major sites, after significant pandemic related delays in the process. TCHS is also pursuing National Head Start Association Program of Excellence accreditation, which will be a stamp of approval for the whole agency.

2. TCHS will analyze, evaluate, and implement a process to improve the organization’s use of data to “tell our story” and make better informed agency decisions by January 31, 2021. →

TCHS created a quality improvement (QI) dashboard through a partnership with CCR analytics. Each TCHS department is also in the process of developing improved methods for ongoing data tracking.

3. TCHS will create and implement a comprehensive Marketing Plan and strategies to better support all aspects of the organization annually, beginning September 2020 with the creation and implementation to begin at the start of each fiscal year, beginning February 2021. →

TCHS hired a Communications and Engagement Coordinator and has seen success in social media marketing efforts, which continue to expand.

4. TCHS will continue to build relationships with area schools, superintendents, and community partners, including local and state elected officials to grow the base of local Head Start advocates and supporters by inviting them to visit our centers and conducting community presentations throughout the grant period. →

TCHS’s leadership team makes a continuous effort to maintain relationships to address this objective, which is sometimes challenging due to turnover in officials in these positions.

## KEY INSIGHTS

# COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

**GOAL: TRI-COUNTY HEAD START WILL INCREASE COMMUNITY AWARENESS THAT WE ARE LEADERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.**

### STRENGTHS

Most families find out about TCHS through word of mouth, and TCHS has an excellent reputation with those who are served by the organization (Appendix pages A77-78).

Families are generally satisfied with TCHS, as revealed by responses to many items on the family survey (Appendix page A45). Notably, 94% of parents who responded would recommend TCHS to family or friends and 89% of parents acknowledged that they were able to make positive changes in their lives while their children were attending TCHS (Appendix pages A83-84). 91% of parents feel heard by TCHS (Appendix page A52).

Having all classrooms using the COR Advantage child assessment system with the High Scope curriculum allows presentation of data showing student progress over the course of the program year (Appendix pages A8-13).

52% of families have been with TCHS for more than 1 year (Appendix page A48).

### OPPORTUNITIES

TCHS served one prenatal mother during the 2023-2024 program year and three during the previous year; efforts should be made to increase community awareness of the prenatal support and education available.

Continue to establish new family partnership agreements to actively strengthen and support TCHS parents

Consider ways to leverage and expand the word-of-mouth outreach to recruit new TCHS families; this could include spreading information through community partners like healthcare providers

Continue expanding and facilitating volunteer opportunities to increase in-kind contributions

# 2020-2025 GOAL AREA

# LOCATIONS AND ACCESS

**GOAL: TRI-COUNTY HEAD START WILL IMPROVE ACCESS TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES FOR THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WE SERVE.**

## OBJECTIVE

## PROGRESS

1. TCHS will seek out opportunities to occupy facilities that will allow consolidation of classroom, office, and storage spaces, in addition to space for our community partners to develop hubs of services for children, families, and the community by January 31, 2025.



TCHS continually works to identify potential sites for expansion, and progress from these efforts have included the acquisition of a new site in Millburg, MI, anticipated to open in fall 2024. To further enhance the organization's ability to acquire new facilities, Tri-County Council for Child Development, Inc. has hired a Development Director with funding from a private foundation at the beginning of 2024.

2. Build collaborative relationships to help families receive prenatal, health, dental, mental health, transportation access, and crisis services and convenient locations, such as our centers, by January 31, 2025.



TCHS's family services team continually builds connections for community resource referrals, and is working to develop data tracking methods that will allow targeted provisions of resources based on the specific needs at specific sites.



## KEY INSIGHTS

## LOCATIONS AND ACCESS

**GOAL: TRI-COUNTY HEAD START WILL IMPROVE ACCESS TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES FOR THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WE SERVE.**

### STRENGTHS

For 80.9% of families TCHS classroom hours meet families' needs, and for 95% of families TCHS facility locations meet families' needs (Appendix pages A57 and A60).

94.8% of families who requested resources felt that their needs were fully met through the assistance of their family advocate or home visitor (Appendix page A70).

99% of TCHS children are up to date on immunizations, 96% are up to date on well child exams, and 77% are up to date on dental exams (Appendix page A28)

### OPPORTUNITIES

For 15.5% of families, TCHS hours end too early, revealing a demand for before and aftercare (Appendix page A57)

# School Readiness Goals

After multiple years of phasing in the High Scope curriculum, 2023-2024 was the first year that the COR Advantage child assessment system was in use in all TCHS classrooms, allowing tracking of overall student progress in the following goal and objective areas. For the COR Advantage assessment scores given below, a 4.0 is considered the threshold for kindergarten readiness (note that all students are included in the average scores, not only the students preparing to transition to kindergarten in the next school year). Scoring periods 1, 2, and 3 correspond to segments of the traditional fall-spring school/program year. Assessment sub-category scores and score trends are presented in more detail in the Appendix (pages A8-13).



## GOAL: APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Students will use creativity, curiosity, and initiative to engage in learning and communication.

### OBJECTIVE:

Students will demonstrate a positive approach to learning through initiative, planning, and persistence.

### OUTCOMES:

Head Start: average student score improved from 3.2 to 4.1 from period 1 (P1) to period 3 (P3)

Early Head Start: average student score improved from 2.0 to 2.5 from P1 to P3

## GOAL: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

Students will express a broad range of emotions of self and others.

### OBJECTIVES:

Students will recognize, express, and manage emotions and actions with increasing independence.

Students will use relationships to develop knowledge of self and others.

### OUTCOMES:

Head Start: Average student score improved from 3.2 to 4.2 from P1 to P3

Early Head Start: average student score improved from 2.0 to 2.6 from P1 to P3

## GOAL: LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Students will develop knowledge and skills for reading, writing, and communication.

### OBJECTIVES:

Students will develop early reading, emergency literacy, and writing skills.

Students will use increasingly complex vocabulary and communication skills.

### OUTCOMES:

Head Start: average student score improved from 2.9 to 3.5 from P1 to P3

Early Head Start: average student score improved from 1.8 to 2.3 from P1 to P3

## GOAL: PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Students will gain and coordinate motor movements through healthy behaviors to explore their environment.

### OBJECTIVES:

Students will demonstrate motor control and apply that to their environment and interactions with others.

Students will develop personal care and healthy habits.

### OUTCOMES:

Head Start: average student score improved from 3.9 to 4.7 from P1 to P3

Early Head Start: average student score improved from 2.6 to 3.0 from P1 to P3

## GOAL: COGNITION

Students will develop various cognitive skills and apply to learning, math, and science.

### OBJECTIVES:

Students will develop cognitive skills which include reasoning, memory, problem-solving, and thinking.

Students will observe, predict, investigate, and analyze their world.

Students will explore and use skills in mathematical thinking.

### OUTCOMES:

#### Head Start

Mathematics: average student score improved from 2.9 to 3.8 from P1 to P3

Creative arts: average student score improved from 3.2 to 4.2 from P1 to P3

Science and technology: average student score improved from 3.2 to 4.1 from P1 to P3

Social studies: average student score improved from 3.2 to 4.1 from P1 to P3

#### Early Head Start

Mathematics: average student score improved from 1.8 to 2.3 from P1 to P3

Creative arts: average student score improved from 1.9 to 2.5 from P1 to P3

Science and technology: average student score improved from 1.9 to 2.5 from P1 to P3

Social studies: average student score improved from 2.0 to 2.4 from P1 to P3

# Action Items and Anticipated Outcomes

## Goal area: Community

**Action items:** TCHS will continue to expand and develop strategies to maximize community awareness of the organization and its offerings. This should include new ways of reaching out to prenatal mothers, increased tracking and marketing of TCHS success stories, and increased communication with employers to develop strategies for employer partnerships to support employee childcare needs.

**Anticipated outcomes:** Increased community awareness of TCHS's offerings and leadership in early childhood education will have many positive cascading effects. Increased outreach to prenatal mothers will result in more mothers benefiting from prenatal support and education and will allow their children to benefit from TCHS services from the earliest ages. Increased marketing of TCHS success stories will build TCHS brand awareness in the community broadly, and will help build a positive reputation that will result in increased community support for efforts to expand and serve more families.

## Goal area: Access/Expansion

**Action items:** TCHS will expand efforts to acquire new sites through fundraising and community awareness campaigns headed by a new Development Director, recently hired using funds from a private foundation (not Head Start funded). TCHS will also consider options for providing additional resources at current sites, such as laundry facilities, professional clothing closets, food pantries, and cooking classes.

**Anticipated outcomes:** Expanded capacity to pursue new locations will accelerate the long and complicated process of acquiring new facilities. Increased resource offerings at current sites will increase opportunities for engaging with TCHS parents, leading to increased parent involvement and volunteering. These resources will also alleviate some barriers currently experienced by parents.

## Goal area: Organizational culture and staff advancement

**Action items:** TCHS will continue to integrate Conscious Discipline principles at all levels of the organization by targeted training efforts focused on each role. TCHS will also continue to increase the percentage of teachers with a BA towards the 51% goal by supporting a training plan for all new teacher hires to earn a BA with TCHS facilitation and support.

**Anticipated outcomes:** Increased training and buy in for Conscious Discipline will accrue the evidence-based positive outcomes of that program for the children, families, and staff involved in TCHS. Continuous improvement of staff education and training levels will further develop TCHS's reputation for excellence and professionalism in early childhood education, and will further increase the investment and satisfaction that staff have in their work.

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This report is also available at [www.tricountyhs.org](http://www.tricountyhs.org).

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